CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1.   In a web-based business information system having an internal e-mail facility, a
5 method for facilitating and tracking e-mail communications between (i) an end user of the
web-based business information system and (ii) an external contact that is not an end user
of the web-based business information system, comprising:

     sending an initial e-mail message from said internal e-mail facility to the external
contact, wherein a domain of a REPLY-TO field of said initial e-mail message corresponds
10 to a domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a local part of said REPLY-TO
field of said initial e-mail message comprises a tracking string encoding tracking
information associated with said end user and said external contact with respect to said
web-based business information system;

     receiving a first reply e-mail message from said external contact replying to said
15 initial e-mail message, said first reply e-mail message having a TO field including said
tracking string; and

     sending a modified version of said first reply e-mail message to a native e-mail
address of the end user, said native e-mail address corresponding to a native e-mail system
of the end user different than said internal e-mail facility and lying outside said web-based
20 business information system, wherein a domain of a REPLY-TO field of said modified
version of said first reply e-mail message corresponds to said domain of said internal e-
mail facility, and wherein a local part of said REPLY-TO field comprises a first modified
version of said tracking string.

25 2.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

     generating a first metadata object based on said tracking string of said first reply e-
mail message, wherein said first metadata object associates said first reply e-mail message
with said end user, said external contact, and at least one business functionality
therebetween to be tracked by web-based business information system; and
30   archiving said first reply e-mail message according to at least one characteristic of
said first metadata object.

3.   The method of claim 2, further comprising generating a viewable communication log screen including information derived from said first metadata object.

5   4.   The method of claim 2, further comprising:

receiving a second reply e-mail message from said end user replying to said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, said second reply e-mail message having a TO field including said first modified version of said tracking string; and

sending a modified version of said second reply e-mail message to the external
10   contact, wherein a domain of a REPLY-TO field of said modified version of said second reply e-mail message corresponds to said domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a local part of said REPLY-TO field comprises a second modified version of said tracking string.

15   5.   The method of claim 4, further comprising:

generating a second metadata object based on said second modified version of said tracking string of said second reply e-mail message, wherein said second metadata object associates said second reply e-mail message with said end user, said external contact, and said at least one business functionality; and
20   archiving said second reply e-mail message according to at least one characteristic of said second metadata object.

6.   The method of claim 5, further comprising generating a viewable communication log screen including information derived from said first metadata object and said second
25   metadata object.

7.   The method of claim 4, wherein said native e-mail system of said end user is a web-hosted e-mail service.

30   8.   The method of claim 4, wherein said native e-mail system of said end user is a dedicated desktop e-mail application.

9.   The method of claim 4, wherein said internal e-mail facility is operated out of a same Internet domain as said web-based business information system.

5   10.   The method of claim 4, wherein said initial e-mail message comprises a message body manually composed by the end user.

11.   The method of claim 4, wherein said initial e-mail message is automatically sent on behalf of the end user by said web-based business information system.

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12.   The method of claim 4, wherein said REPLY-TO field of said initial e-mail message further comprises a display name for said end user that is substantially identical to a display name associated with said end user in said native e-mail system of the end user.

15 13.   The method of claim 4, wherein said web-based business information system is provided by an application service provider and subscribed to by a business enterprise with which said end user is affiliated.

14.   The method of claim 4, wherein said web-based business information system is
20 self-hosted by a business enterprise with which said end user is affiliated.

15.   In a web-based business information system having an internal e-mail facility, a method for facilitating and tracking e-mail communications between (i) an end user of the web-based business information system and (ii) an external contact that is not an end user
25 of the web-based business information system, comprising:
        sending an initial e-mail message from said internal e-mail facility to the external contact, wherein a domain of a reply-designating header field of said initial e-mail message corresponds to a domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a local part of said reply-designating header field of said initial e-mail message comprises a tracking string
30 encoding tracking information associated with said end user and said external contact with respect to said web-based business information system;

receiving a first reply e-mail message from said external contact replying to said initial e-mail message, said first reply e-mail message having a TO field including said tracking string; and

sending a modified version of said first reply e-mail message to a native e-mail
5   address of the end user, said native e-mail address corresponding to a native e-mail system of the end user different than said internal e-mail facility and lying outside said web-based business information system, wherein a domain of a reply-designating header field of said modified version of said first reply e-mail message corresponds to said domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a local part of said reply-designating header field
10 comprises a first modified version of said tracking string.

16.   The method of claim 15, further comprising:

generating a first metadata object based on said tracking string of said first reply e-mail message, wherein said first metadata object associates said first reply e-mail message
15 with said end user, said external contact, and at least one business functionality therebetween to be tracked by web-based business information system; and

archiving said first reply e-mail message according to at least one characteristic of said first metadata object.

20 17.   The method of claim 16, further comprising:

receiving a second reply e-mail message from said end user replying to said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, said second reply e-mail message having a TO field including said first modified version of said tracking string; and

sending a modified version of said second reply e-mail message to the external
25 contact, wherein a domain of a reply-designating header field of said modified version of said second reply e-mail message corresponds to said domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a local part of said reply-designating header field comprises a second modified version of said tracking string.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said reply-designating header fields of said initial e-mail message, said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, and said modified version of said second reply e-mail message are each REPLY-TO fields.

5 19. The method of claim 17, wherein said reply-designating header fields of said initial e-mail message, said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, and said modified version of said second reply e-mail message are each FROM fields.

20. In a web-based business information system having an internal e-mail facility, a
10 method for facilitating and tracking e-mail communications between (i) an end user of the web-based business information system and (ii) an external contact that is not an end user of the web-based business information system, comprising:

sending an initial e-mail message from said internal e-mail facility to the external contact, wherein a domain of a reply-designating header field of said initial e-mail message
15 corresponds to a domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a first thread-recurrent field of said initial e-mail message comprises a tracking string encoding tracking information associated with said end user and said external contact with respect to said web-based business information system;

receiving a first reply e-mail message from said external contact replying to said
20 initial e-mail message, said first reply e-mail message having a TO field including said domain of said internal e-mail facility, said first reply e-mail message comprising said tracking string in said first thread-recurrent field thereof; and

sending a modified version of said first reply e-mail message to a native e-mail address of the end user, said native e-mail address corresponding to a native e-mail system
25 of the end user different than said internal e-mail facility and lying outside said web-based business information system, wherein a domain of a reply-designating header field of said modified version of said first reply e-mail message corresponds to said domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a second thread-recurrent field of said modified version of said first reply e-mail message comprises a first modified version of said
30 tracking string.

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21. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

generating a first metadata object based on said tracking string of said first reply e-mail message, wherein said first metadata object associates said first reply e-mail message with said end user, said external contact, and at least one business functionality

5 therebetween to be tracked by web-based business information system; and

archiving said first reply e-mail message according to at least one characteristic of said first metadata object.

22. The method of claim 21, further comprising:

10 receiving a second reply e-mail message from said end user replying to said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, said second reply e-mail message having a TO field including said domain of said internal e-mail facility, said second reply e-mail message having said first modified version of said tracking string in said second thread-recurrent field thereof; and

15 sending a modified version of said second reply e-mail message to the external contact, wherein a domain of a reply-designating header field of said modified version of said second reply e-mail message corresponds to said domain of said internal e-mail facility, and wherein a third thread-recurrent field of said modified version of said second reply e-mail message comprises a second modified version of said tracking string.

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23. The method of claim 22, wherein said reply-designating header fields of said initial e-mail message, said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, and said modified version of said second reply e-mail message are each REPLY-TO fields.

25 24. The method of claim 22, wherein said first, second, and third thread-recurrent fields are the same as said REPLY-TO fields of said initial e-mail message, said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, and said modified version of said second reply e-mail message, respectively.

30 25. The method of claim 22, wherein said first, second, and third thread-recurrent fields are each SUBJECT fields.

26.	The method of claim 22, wherein said first, second, and third thread-recurrent fields are encrypted into body fields of said initial e-mail message, said modified version of said first reply e-mail message, and said modified version of said second reply e-mail message, respectively.